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THE FIFTH AVENUE.

BY

CARLO LEONE.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT

TO THE GRACE CHURCH CONGREGATION.

NEW-YORK:
PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND FOR SALE BY THE PRINCIPAL BOOKSELLERS.
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NEW YORK.

NO. 1.

“The abstract hatred and scorn of vice implies the capacity for virtue. The impatience expressed at the most striking instances of deformity, proves the innate idea, and love of beauty, in the human mind.”—*Hazlitt*.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN THE AUTHOR INTRODUCES HIMSELF, HIS FRIEND, AND
OTHER PEOPLE, WHOM THE READER MAY RECOGNISE.

It was one of the loveliest Spring mornings, succeeding a number of dark days, during which rain and sunshine had held alternate sway. The sun shone forth friendly-looking down upon the inhabitants of our little earth, and instilling its invigorating influence throughout the universe,

It was one of those days on which the ladies expedite their morning meal, to make preparations for a nice little walk, and to fulfil the engagements which have accumulated upon their hands; when Broadway is crowded, and the side-walks offer the most beautiful picture of American life, and American beauty; when a hundred friendly greetings are given and received, and a pleasing forgetfulness of the chill winter blast pervades the inner and adorns the outward man.

It was upon that very morning when I, leaving my home, directed my steps towards Broadway, (that great and only rival of London's Regent street,) with the intention of joining the passing throng that enlivened its sidewalk, when I felt suddenly my hand warmly shaken, and encountered the serene and happy face of an old friend.

"Is it really you, my dear friend," he exclaimed; "and shall I have the good fortune of spending with you an agreeable morning like this, which the gods have evidently set apart for joy and pleasure? Let me lead you, then." And without giving me

time to answer, he had put his arm in mine, and began to speak of something else.

Resigning myself entirely to his guidance, I was pleased when I saw him direct his steps toward the Fifth Avenue; for, as I was often told before, Fifth Avenue was the street of aristocracy; the street of blood; the street, as my friend very emphatically remarked, "where beauty is displayed, admired, and selected; through which courses the refined stream, whose fountain-head is traceable to a Dutch Patroon, or an English Nobleman. Let other people speak about their Parks, their *Boulevards*, their *Bastions*, their *Glacis*," he continued, "and let even our own people praise their Gramercy Square, their Fourteenth street—with its twofold attraction of a view on the East and North River—there is only one spot on which beauty erects her throne, and where refinement wields her sceptre—one Fifth Avenue." And this, dear reader, shall be the field of our observations for the next two hours.

But before proceeding further, allow me to ac-

quaint you with the two individuals whom you are invited to accompany on their philosophical promenade.

Who I am, is of no consequence. Just imagine a discreet and retiring foreigner, fresh from Europe, to learn American customs, and to forget European Republicanism ; a man whom neither ladies of fashion nor men of business care for, as he has no beautifully curled moustache, which would win the smile of the first, nor those bank certificates, which would secure the hand-shakes of the last. Suffice it to say that I am no Hungarian Governor ; no Polish lady of high birth ; no French Count, nor even a newly arrived English lecturer ; in short, it would be of little interest to know me, and I shall simply give my name as "Leone." Of much more consequence, however, is it to know my friend, commonly called Dick, but whose real name is Galignanis. He is a gentleman very plebeian in person and dress. His origin is almost as fabulous as that of ancient Rome or Carthage. Like them, he sometimes borrows nobility, from the uncertainty

of fable, and his own story of his descent is as clear as a mythological mystery.

Modern historians, however, being mere matter-of-fact people, and looking for the origin of great men among the respectable trade of the community, have traced his fountain-head to the "hat," and selected his progenitor from among the honest inventors of the masculine head-gear. This fact may account for his being seen so constantly in the streets of New York, as there he is certainly displaying his father's best manufacture to the greatest advantage.

Of his high ancestry G. is not proud. He bows to everybody to whom he is introduced, even to the father of some young lady whose title to \$100,000 is clear and indisputable, to be paid down upon the day of her marriage. And his only disadvantage is, that he labors under an optical difficulty, which prevents his recognition of an intimate friend who, by some sudden change of circumstances, has been obliged to dispose of his equipage or retrench his fashionable expenses. Mr. G. can

talk upon everything. He is a living book—a breathing volume—a talking-machine, as a pretty young lady calls him with a great deal of truth. Mention a book—Mr. G. *lauds* it to the sky, or condemns it to everlasting disgrace, just as he finds your opinion. Speak of the last Opera—the last Concert—the French Vaudeville—Mdlle. Caroline Loyo. He has seen and heard everything—read all the critiques—and by his peculiar attractions in conversation, he is naturally a favorite of those ladies who dread that pause in the gossip of an evening, when none of the parties can resume the thread of scandal; when every tongue rests suddenly, and the conversants look into each other's face in mournful silence. A really sensible woman would be afraid of Mr. G.'s conversation, while he will charm the ignorant, who mistakes his forward impertinence for style, and his confident assertions for knowledge. “Have you been at the last *matinée musicale* of Mrs. Nightowl, in Blue street?” is the first question he asks me. “Wasn't it delightful?—such singing—such playing New

York has seldom witnessed. And how pretty Miss M. looked—the daughter of my most intimate friend, Mrs. L. There were only a few gentlemen present; in fact, I think we were only four. Only the most intimate *habitués de la maison*.” And this last is true. He is a *habitué de la maison* at Mrs. Nightowl’s, whose antecedents are of a similar nature to those of Galignanis, yet who by some inconceivable means has secured an introduction into good society, and by a very natural similarity of habits has installed Galignanis in the enviable position of her bosom friend. To him she is at home at all hours; and refreshes her morning lassitude in listening to the scandalous gossip which Mr. G. makes it his business to collect. At these meetings the two worthy individuals rear a fabric of falsehood upon some slight foundation of truth, and direct the public attention to it as an evidence of honest people’s demerits. At those meetings stories are invented which bury the good name and reputation of thousands—stories which, as I remarked, have some truth, but are pressed in a

shape that renders the truth indiscernible, and are the more dangerous. For rumors and gossip in which there is no truth, may easily be contradicted and refuted, but where the fact is true, the honest motive, however, which led to it, is concealed; and where such facts, through malicious additions and inventions, are deformed, there remains nothing to the poor injured person who loses his name and reputation by it. Do you want to put a contradiction in the paper, and give publicity to the name of a person whom you respect? Such is the way, dear reader, in which Mrs. Nightowl and Mr. Galignanis pass their mornings. And let me tell you, in a perfectly serious moment, that this short description is not merely a dream from the author's brain, but is a true relation of facts. But Mr. Galignanis is not only the *habitué* of Mrs. Nightowl's, he is the beloved friend of a hundred other families. With a smile for every one, and a fawning, sycophantic manner of offering his courtesies to those whose favors he expects, he is right in the belief that humility to the vain, and flattery

to the weak points of our friends, are the two great principles in the doctrine of manners, by which we progress in life and grow strong in its ways. But you ask, dear reader, how I can be intimate with a man whose character I have described? Let me state, therefore, briefly, that during a residence in Paris I contracted an intimacy with a young American of good family, who, hearing of my intention of visiting America, wrote me a letter of introduction to Mr. Galignanis. "Go to him," he said, "and you will see everything. He will spare you the expense of a guide, and prove a capital finger-post in directing you to the fashionable localities and celebrities of my native Gotham." And so it was.

There is nothing easier on earth, than to secure an *entrée* to New York society.

Do not suppose, dear reader, that I refer to the real good society of your city, which is certainly as fastidious in its tastes, as refined in its acquirements, and as exclusive in its members, as the society of any European city. Education, of course, begets

the same sound, social feeling, all over the world—producing refinement wherever it is received, and engendering real elegance wherever it predominates. I say it with sincerity. The educated society of New York, whose pretensions (if they can be called pretensions) are traced all to the most legitimate sources, is inferior to no society on earth. To such society, of course, the *entrée* is not so easily attained; but to that phase of fashionable circles which arrogates to itself the first position of social life, and supports its presumption by a splendid show of equipage, a vulgar glare of costly furniture, and an uncomfortable series of crowded parties, all maintained by the proceeds of successful ribbon sales or unscrupulous land speculations, in the course of which three failures, with their consequent compromises, are discernible, the vulgar may at all times be admitted; as they possess the requirements which vulgarity, aping elegance, demands of them.

The very circumstance that the fashionable society is composed of such people, accounts for the

facility with which you have access to it. They cannot distinguish between real good manners and vulgarity; a well-dressed man, fixed up by his tailor, is their ideal; if he has the happy idea to wear his hat on the left ear, he is their god. A man who dances well is the most estimable man of society; he gets invitations without number, and all the young ladies are delighted to see him.

It was, many an evening, when I came home from a party, fatigued and most exhausted, not by dancing, (for, unfortunately, my father was not fashionable enough to have me taught this greatest accomplishment of our days,) but by efforts I had to make to press myself through the intense crowd which filled two small parlors—a work of considerable difficulty, and which reminded me of those Russian vapor baths, so well known in Europe, for their good effect upon the health—that I found, after coming home, three or four invitations for the same evening, which my worthy friend, Brown, that sexton of the sextons, without whom New

York would not be what it is; that undertaker of things which none before him ever undertook, left on my table.

But while I am speaking of that so-called fashionable society, I cannot leave unmentioned another class, which constitutes the real and only existing aristocracy, that of mind and intelligence, whose members having retired to their comfortable, though not hyperluxurious houses, are not imitating everything that is French; are not importing their hats and bonnets from France; are not driving in box-covered carriages, with two men attending behind in livery and waiting upon them; who do not think that an article is bad on account of its being American; who are not going to leave these shores, and to live in Paris and Naples, because New York is not fashionable enough. I speak of those families with a good old name, who are respectable, because they rely upon themselves. I speak of those men, who, distinguished by their mind, sacrifice their time and their talent to the welfare of this great country; on whom the United States look

with pride, in the face of all Europe. Those men and their families you meet sometimes in that society I spoke of; but what a difference in their manners; what a really good behavior, which is not like the French, because it is superior to it, and is original!

And now, dear reader, excuse my digression from the way I had entered. Let us go back to our friend Galignanis, whom we left putting his arm in mine, to take our morning walk.

We will not say anything more about him, as the readers might be tired by too long a description, and, besides, in the next two hours will have occasion to judge about him themselves. We will only add, that his walk is an eternal smile, an everlasting bow, which is, however, varied according to the importance of the persons we meet. "So you are entirely established in New York, my dear Leone," Galignanis begins. "And you like the American life,—and you think of spending here the whole summer until—— But is that not my most intimate friend, Mrs. Peacock?" he exclaims suddenly;

and at the very instant, a lady of rather stylish appearance, but whose features express pride, malice, heartlessness, and at the same time, the sincere desire to conceal all those qualities by a most graceful grimace, meets my eye. "This, Leone, is my friend, Mrs. Peacock, the mother of the same sweet-looking lady you admired so much at our last *matinée musicale*. Look at the dignity in her appearance. Have you such women in Paris?" and addressing me this question, he waited for an answer. But I could not remember anything; I saw nothing but that cold face, with the serpent-like expression. I saw those long black curls falling over the thin cheeks, and giving an exact picture of Macbeth's witch, where she sings :

"I will drain him dry as hay,
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-like lid," &c.

I had seen Madame Laffarge, who had poisoned her husband. I was present at the famous trial in Paris some years ago, where a mother had beaten

her child until it was dead, but never was the expression in the face of any of those women to be compared to that of Mrs. Peacock.

“O, I must introduce you,” said Galignanis, without remarking my horror. “Mrs. Peacock will like you very much; she likes anything that is European, and told me very often that she would leave, with pleasure, her husband and her children, to go to Europe, and never come back to that disagreeable place—‘that Republic,’ where every one is your equal; where you are exposed to the insult of those common people. ‘If my mother dies,’ she used to say, ‘I shall go; nothing will prevent me. I will have money then to live independent, and I quit these United States for ever!’” May she go, and never return to these shores—this land of humanity and real freedom—I thought by myself.

But, for the whole day, the dark expression of those pernicious eyes; the grinning smile of those painted lips, would not leave my memory. How

rightly I judged that woman's character, we will see in some other chapter. But now to a friendlier picture.





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